

What is claimed is:

1. A fully automated method of facilitating an electronic auction between a prospective buyer and a plurality of prospective sellers with near perfect information, comprising the steps of:
 - a) inputting into a computer a buyer's request for an offer;
 - b) communicating the request for an offer to at least two of the sellers;
 - c) receiving offers, including terms of sale in response to the request for an offer, from at least two of the sellers;
 - d) automatically generating rating information about seller offers based on a plurality of predetermined criteria;
 - e) communicating information regarding at least some of the seller offers to at least one other seller;
 - f) receiving an adjusted offer from at least one of the sellers during a specified auction period; and
 - g) communicating information regarding at least some of the seller offers and at least part of the rating information to the buyer.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

2 inputting into a computer a buyer's request for information about products or
3 services;
4 finding information in response to the request; and
5 communicating at least part of the information found to the buyer.

1 3. The method of claim 2, wherein said request is inputted using an electronic template.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein said template includes a list of product or service
2 features.

1 5. The method of claim 2, wherein said information communicated to the buyer includes
2 information found with a suggestion module.

1 6. The method of claim 2, wherein all the steps occur without the buyer actively
2 initiating a transfer to a different computer.

1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the computer is operated by a service provider
2 unrelated to either the buyer or the sellers.

1 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the service provider operates via an independent
2 destination on the World Wide Web.

1 9. The method of claim 7, wherein the service provider is embedded within a third party
2 service.

1 10. The method of claim 9, wherein the embedded service is operated by the service
2 provider on an out-source basis.

1 11. The method of claim 9, wherein the embedded service is operated by the third party.

1 12. The method of claim 1, wherein said request is input using a graphical user interface.

1 13. The method of claim 12, wherein said graphical user interface includes natural
2 language input.

1 14. The method of claim 12, wherein said graphical user interface includes an electronic
2 template for a structured language query.

1 15. The method of claim 12, wherein said graphical user interface includes a list of
2 requested features.

1 16. The method of claim 1, wherein said request is input using a voice user interface.

1 17. The method of claim 16, wherein said voice user interface includes natural language
2 input.

1 18. The method of claim 1, wherein said request includes a plurality of criteria
2 concerning buyer preferences.

1 19. The method of claim 18, wherein said criteria are weighted at least in part by the
2 buyer.

1 20. The method of claim 18, wherein said criteria are weighted at least in part by a
2 computer program.

1 21. The method of claim 20, wherein said computer program's weightings are based at
2 least in part on information about the buyer's previous buying behavior.

1 22. The method of claim 20, wherein said computer program's weightings are based at
2 least in part on information about the buyer's peer group.

1 23. The method of claim 20, wherein said computer program's weightings are based at
2 least in part on a demographic model.

1 24. The method of claim 18, wherein said criteria are weighted at least in part by an
2 expert recommendation.

1 25. The method of claim 18, wherein said criteria are shown using a graphical user
2 interface.

1 26. The method of claim 1, wherein said request includes constraints chosen by the buyer.

1 27. The method of claim 26, wherein said constraints include a limited geographic area.

2 28. The method of claim 26, wherein said constraints include a distance from the buyer.

1 29. The method of claim 26, wherein said constraints include a level of product or service
2 quality.

1 30. The method of claim 1, wherein said request includes asking the sellers to apply a
2 suggestion module to said request.

1 31. The method of claim 30, wherein said module can exclude specific products or
2 services from a seller's offer.

1 32. The method of claim 30, wherein said module can augment a seller's offer to include
2 additional products or services not specifically requested by the buyer.

1 33. The method of claim 1, wherein said buyer remains anonymous to said prospective
2 sellers.

1 34. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of the request for an offer
2 includes searching a database for offers corresponding to the request.

1 35. The method of claim 34, wherein said database is at least in part precompiled.

1 36. The method of claim 34, wherein said database is at least in part compiled on the fly.

1 37. The method of claim 1, wherein a software process initiates the communicating the
2 request for an offer step at specific time periods.

1 38. The method of claim 1, further comprising communicating information about the
2 buyer to at least one of the sellers.

1 39. The method of claim 38, wherein said information about the buyer is communicated
2 to a seller in exchange for consideration to the buyer.

1 40. The method of claim 39, wherein said consideration is a price discount.

1 41. The method of claim 39, wherein said consideration is a price rebate.

1 42. The method of claim 39, wherein said consideration is a loyalty program incentive.

1 43. The method of claim 38, wherein said information about the buyer includes personal
2 information supplied by the buyer.

1 44. The method of claim 38, wherein said information about the buyer includes the
2 buyer's credit information.

1 45. The method of claim 38, wherein said information about the buyer includes
2 information supplied by a third party.

1 46. The method of claim 38, wherein said information about the buyer includes
2 information about the buyer's prior use of buyer's auctions.

1 47. The method of claim 1, wherein said rating information is a ranking.

1 48. The method of claim 1, wherein said rating information is a numerical score.

1 49. The method of claim 1, wherein said rating information is a letter grade.

1 50. The method of claim 1, wherein said rating information is an analog rating.

1 51. The method of claim 1, wherein said seller offers include the identity of the offerer.

2 52. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
1 information takes place before the auction period.

2 53. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
1 information takes place during the auction period.

2 54. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
1 information takes place after the auction period.

1 55. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
2 information takes place in exchange for consideration.

1 56. The method of claim 55, wherein said consideration includes an information fee.

1 57. The method of claim 1, wherein said adjusted offer is adjusted at least in part by a
2 computer algorithm.

1 58. The method of claim 57, wherein said computer algorithm uses the seller's business
2 rules.

1 59. The method of claim 57, wherein said computer algorithm uses information about
2 the buyer.

1 60. The method of claim 57, wherein said computer algorithm uses information about
2 the seller.

1 61. The method of claim 57, wherein said computer algorithm uses at least part of the
2 information communicated about the seller offers.

1 62. The method of claim 1, wherein the time remaining in the specified auction period is
2 communicated to the buyer and at least one of the sellers.

2 63. The method of claim 1, wherein the buyer's auction includes specified auction
parameters.

1 64. The method of claim 63, wherein said auction parameters are specified by the buyer.

1 65. The method of claim 63, wherein said auction parameters are specified by a
2 computer program.

1 66. The method of claim 63, wherein said auction parameters include the number of
2 auction rounds.

1 67. The method of claim 63, wherein said auction parameters include the time for an
2 auction round.

1 68. The method of claim 63, wherein said auction parameters include the use of sealed
2 bids during an auction round.

1 69. The method of claim 1, wherein said adjusted offer expires after a time period
2 specified by the offerer.

1 70. The method of claim 1, wherein said adjusted offer expires after a time specified by
2 the offerer.

1 71. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
2 information takes place before the auction period.

1 72. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
2 information takes place during the auction period.

1 73. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
2 information takes place after the auction period.

1 74. The method of claim 1, wherein a software process initiates the communicating of
2 seller offers and rating information to the buyer when a buyer-specified event occurs.

1 75. The method of claim 74, wherein the buyer-specified event is the receipt of a seller
2 offer with a rating above a buyer-specified rating level.

1 76. The method of claim 1, wherein said communicating of seller offers and rating
2 information to the buyer includes side-by-side comparisons of a plurality of seller
3 offers.

1 77. The method of claim 1, further comprising communicating an offer for ancillary
2 goods and services to the buyer, wherein said offer is related to the buyer's request
3 for an offer and attached to an offer from a seller.

1 78. The method of claim 1, further comprising adding information about the auction to a
2 database.

1 79. The method of claim 78, wherein said information about the auction is generated by
2 the buyer's input.

1 80. The method of claim 78, wherein said information about the auction is generated by
2 a seller's input.

1 81. The method of claim 78, wherein said information about the auction is generated by
2 the auction process.

1 82. The method of claim 78, wherein said information about the auction is generated by
2 a third party.

1 83. The method of claim 1, further comprising selling information about the auction.

1 84. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction is proprietary
2 and is not available elsewhere on the Internet.

1 85. The method of claim 83, wherein said selling is done on a subscription basis.

1 86. The method of claim 83, wherein said selling is done based on a per auction fee.

1 87. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes said
2 request for an offer.

1 88. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes said
2 plurality of criteria concerning buyer preferences.

1 89. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes at least
2 a portion of at least one of said received offers.

1 90. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes at least
2 a portion of at least one of said adjusted offers.

1 91. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes rating
2 information about at least one of said adjusted offers.

1 92. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes a
2 recommendation for an adjusted offer.

1 93. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction includes an
2 analysis of the auction results.

1 94. The method of claim 83, wherein said information about the auction is aggregated
2 with information from other auctions.

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1 95. The method of claim 1, further comprising selling information about the buyer.

1 96. The method of claim 95, wherein said information about the buyer includes buyer
2 preferences.

1 97. The method of claim 95, wherein said information about the buyer includes
2 demographic information.

1 98. The method of claim 95, wherein said information about the buyer includes an
2 estimate of the buyer's lifetime value to a seller.

1 99. The method of claim 95, wherein said information about the buyer includes at least a
2 portion of the buyer's past buying history.

1 100. The method of claim 95, wherein said information about the buyer is aggregated with
2 information from other buyers.

1 101. The method of claim 1, further comprising communicating an acceptance by the
2 buyer of at least one of the seller offers to at least one of the sellers.

1 102. The method of claim 1, further comprising completing the electronic transaction at
2 an electronic site that was also used for the buyer's auction.

1 103. The method of claim 102, wherein the electronic site represents the buyer's
2 electronic site.

1 104. The method of claim 102, wherein the completing step includes transferring
2 electronic funds.

1 105. The method of claim 1, further comprising completing the electronic transaction
2 at an electronic site representing one of the sellers.

1 106. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of automatically generating rating
2 information about seller offers occurs before the step of receiving an adjusted
3 offer.

1 107. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of automatically generating rating
2 information about seller offers occurs after the step of receiving an adjusted offer.

1 108. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of automatically generating rating
2 information about seller offers occurs both before and after the step of receiving
3 an adjusted offer.

1 109. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicating information regarding
2 at least some of the seller offers and at least part of the rating information to at
3 least one of the other sellers occurs before the step of receiving an adjusted offer.

1 110. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicating information regarding
2 at least some of the seller offers and at least part of the rating information to at
3 least one of the other sellers occurs after the step of receiving an adjusted offer.

1 111. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicating information regarding
2 at least some of the seller offers and at least part of the rating information to at
3 least one of the other sellers occurs both before and after the step of receiving an
4 adjusted offer.

1 112. A fully automated system for facilitating an electronic auction between a
2 prospective buyer and a plurality of prospective sellers with near perfect
3 information, comprising:
4 a) means for inputting into a computer a buyer's request for an offer;
5 b) means for communicating the request for an offer to at least two of the
6 plurality of sellers;
7 c) means for receiving offers, including terms of sale in response to the request
8 for an offer, from at least two of the sellers;

9 d) means for automatically generating rating information about seller offers
10 based on a plurality of predetermined criteria;
11 e) means for communicating information regarding at least some of the seller
12 offers to at least one other seller;
13 f) means for receiving an adjusted offer from at least one of the sellers during a
14 specified auction period; and
15 g) means for communicating information regarding at least some of the seller
16 offers and at least part of the rating information to the buyer.

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